
3.0 Content Guidelines

Good content is arguably the most important component of your web presence. Whether you're writing content for your website, social media outlets, or mobile applications, it needs to be simple for your broad audience to read and understand. Your content should use plain language, be friendly, and written and organized in a way that makes it easy to find.

The following guidelines are aimed to help you tune your content for readability and findability on the web.

3.1 Editorial Content

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3.1.1 Plain Language

Plain language is clear, succinct writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly and completely as possible. Plain language strives to be easy to read, understand, and use. It avoids verbose language and jargon.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms and public documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner. State websites should follow the lead by striving to write website content in plain language.

Help your readers quickly find what they need with these web writing tips:

- Less is more! Be concise. Cut the amount of words in half. Eliminate unnecessary words.
- Break documents into separate topics.
- Use even shorter paragraphs than on paper.
- Use short sentences.
- Use short lists and bullets to organize information.
- Use even more headings with less under each heading.
- Questions often make great headings.
- Present each topic or point separately, and use descriptive section headings.
- Make liberal use of white space so pages are easy to scan.
- Write (especially page titles) using the same words your readers would use when doing a web search for the info.
- Don't assume your readers know about the subject or have read related pages on your site. Clearly explain things so each page can stand on its own.
- Never use "click here" as a link ? link language should describe what your reader will get if they click the link.

- Use "you" and other pronouns
- Use active voice.
- Use the simplest tense possible
- Use "must" to express requirements; avoid the ambiguous word "shall"

3.1.2 Editorial Guidelines

- The tone should be active, friendly and warm, while still carrying some authority as the official face of state government.
- Try to convey information in a visual form (creative graphs, charts)
- Use bold text to emphasize words and phrases
- Maintain an Editorial Calendar to keep content up to date. This should include a recurring time to revisit old content pages to update their details, and checking for broken links.
- Content should be written in an inverted pyramid form, with the most important information appearing at the beginning (preferably the first paragraph), and the least important information at the end, where users may be less apt to scroll down and read.
- Write clearly. Provide information that is concise and factual. Make sure that it is worthwhile and can be easily understood by users from a variety of backgrounds.
- Be consistent in the use of titles, subtitles, headings, etc. Effective use of these devices will help users navigate easily through your Web pages.
- Use the same style of text for headings and titles – title case for document titles, references to other Web sites, and proper names – and sentence case for subheads, figure titles, and lists.

Example of Title Case Example of sentence case

- Place links appropriately to maintain the thread of reading, workflow and context.
- Links should not disrupt reading or the task flow. Make sure that the user can maintain context of the information.
- Proofread all text. A spell checker is a good tool for doing this; manual checking is also highly recommended.
- Use AP Style. To keep writing styles consistent across the Georgia agencies, use [The Associated Press Stylebook](#) [1].
- Use a readability tool to test the reading level of your article. A sample tool is [The Readability Test Tool](#) [2]

Frequently Asked Questions pages

Users who need information from a Web site often need a common set of questions answered. These common, most frequently asked questions appear in what has become known as the FAQ. FAQs can centralize the most commonly accessed information in one area so users won't have to search different areas of the site for answers.

- Include FAQs for your Web site, as appropriate. Some appropriate uses include:
 - Providing an overview of your agency's Web site, function, business processes etc.
 - Initial education on a process or task the user needs to complete.
 - Summarizing the top things your agency does.
 - Summarizing the top things a user needs to know.
- Verify that the questions are actually questions that users and constituents have. This can be accomplished through mining user feedback and comments, holding focus groups, performing usability evaluations, etc.

3.1.3 Content Inventory/Audit

A content inventory is an ideal way to determine what content is on your site. It's a listing of every content item on your site, organized hierarchically. From this, you can extend the capability to determine what content should stay on

your site - usually called a content audit. By gathering information about each page - purpose, age, visits - you can decide whether to keep, modify or purge your content.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to do this; no tools exist that automatically create this inventory. It's best to go through each section of your site, noting where each content item occurs and in what context it exists. Using your site map may give you a headstart on the structure, but more than likely, you'll need to flesh out individual pages on your own.

The following template is available to help you create a content inventory.

[Content Inventory Template](#) [3] (xls)

Editorial Calendar

An editorial calendar can help keep your website updated by scheduling times to review, create and retire content. You can use either a spreadsheet, Word document or a calendar program such as Outlook or Google Calendar for this. Document times that you need to publish new content, outline important dates in which news might be forthcoming, and, most importantly, schedule time to review all existing content to see if it needs updating, editing, or deleting.

3.1.4 Resources

- [The Readability Test Tool](#) [2]
- [Content Inventory Template](#) [3] (xls)

3.1.5 References

- [PlainLanguage.gov](#) [4]
- [Online Writing Style](#) [5]
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#) [1]
- [Organizing Your Information](#) [6]

3.2 Information Architecture

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3.2.1 Taxonomy

Taxonomy defines the words and icons used to represent and organize the categories of the website into appropriate classifications of information data.

Proper taxonomy includes both contextual and visual (iconic) elements used throughout the site. The contextual components ensure that selections are named and grouped in accord with a visitor's expectations and mindset based on hierarchical classifications.

- DO NOT use jargon or terms that only your internal staff would understand:

DO Use terms such as... DON'T Use technical terms such as...

Licensing

- Accountants
- Alcohol
- Licenses, Initial
- Alcohol
- License
- Renewal
- Check Sellers
- License
- Renewal

Licensing

- Form 26-B 30002
- Form 27-A 40001-1
- Form 27-B 40001-2
- Form 28 50001

- DO use the same standard terms and phrases throughout the website.
e.g., if the site uses "Go" for a button on one screen, it should use "Go" for the same button on all other screens.
- DO use terminology that the casual visitor would readily find/understand on any other commonly used site.
e.g.: "Site Map" is a commonly understood Web link so don't create your own name such as "Web Hierarchy".

3.2.2 Navigation Menus

To help users find the information they're looking for, it is important to keep your site's navigation menus organized in a way that is manageable for visitors who aren't familiar with your site. The following are some ways to do this.

- DO limit the first level to 7 terms or less for sites using horizontal navigation.
- DO limit the sub navigation to no deeper than 4 child levels.
- DO use simple phrases (1 or 2 words) for menu items to allow for quick scanability.
- DO NOT place links to external pages (pages not within your website) in the navigation menus

Online tools such as [WebSort](#) [7] and [Optimal Workshop](#) [8] can help you to rethink and reorganize your information architecture to fit within these limits.

** Note to portal customers:* the above restrictions for first level and sub navigation are also restricted at the code level on portal websites. No child navigation items deeper than 4 levels will appear in the website navigation, and top-level navigation that doesn't fit in one row on the sites also will not appear.

3.2.3 References

- [Site Structure](#) [9]
- [Presenting Information Architecture](#) [10]

3.2.4 Resources

- [WebSort](#) [7]
- [Optimal Workshop](#) [8]

3.3 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

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Synopsis: Search Engine Optimization guidelines for State of Georgia sites.

Purpose

There are a lot of unknowns in how search engines index pages, and a lot of that happens outside of the content manager's direct control. However, you can implement the following suggestions to help increase search engine rankings and ensure that content is easy to index.

3.3.1 Keywords

It's important to determine which keywords you want to target before adding them to your page. When selecting keywords, be sure to use terms that are relevant to your page content, as well as terms that your target audience would use when searching for that topic.

Analytics data can be an invaluable tool for helping to determine which terms your audience is using to perform internal content searches; those common search terms can become your keywords for individual topics. You may also look to online tools that analyze keyword relevance for individual topic pages. The Resources section of this page lists some free online tools that can help.

Keywords SHOULD be included in the following places on a page:

- **<title>tag** - The title tag must be short (6 or 7 words at most) and the keyword must be near the beginning.
- **URL** - e.g., <http://dhs.georgia.gov/parent-children-services> [11], where "Parent and Children Services" is the keyword phrase
- **Heading tags** - <h1>, <h2>, etc.
- **Alt tags** - Web spiders can't read images, so the alt text of an image tells search engines how to categorize the graphic. e.g., for an image of a generic Georgia driver's license.
- **Body text of a document** - your main keywords should be salted throughout the body text of the document, including near the beginning of the article, where possible. Be sure these terms are relevant to the page content.
- **Meta tags** - while many main search engines do not use <meta> keyword tags in their rankings, including keywords in meta tags will aid in the Georgia.gov internal search categorization of content. Be sure to keep the number of keywords to 20 words or less.
- **Keyword formatting** - use bold and italic formatting to emphasize keywords and key phrases when relevant to the page content.

Keywords SHOULD NOT be used in the following ways:

- **Keyword stuffing** - DO NOT overuse keywords in the hopes of increasing rankings.
- **Keyword dilution** - DO NOT try to use a lot of different keywords in one article, as this will not only confuse the reader but will dilute the power of the main keywords.
- **Keyword misspelling** - DO NOT intentionally misspell keywords - standard search engines already compensate for user error in misspelling keywords.

Notes for Portal customers:

- In some CMS configurations, such as the Vignette and Drupal CMSes used to support Portal customer websites, putting keywords in the title of a content item will ensure that the terms are listed in the `<title>` tag and the Friendly URL for the page.
- The Drupal CMS will use the Keywords field to further index your content for internal searches, so it is important that you use selective keywords for all your content.

3.3.2 Links

- **Link Text** - Link text needs to be explicit to describe the page to which the link directs.
 - DO use the title of a page or a description of page content for a link, e.g. "[Forms and Publications?](#)" or "[For livestock prices, see the Farmers and Consumers Market Bulletin.](#)"
 - DO NOT use "Click Here"
 - DO NOT use a long URL path as the link to a URL
 - DO NOT use images in place of text links for navigation. When an image link accompanies a text link, be sure to use the alt and title attributes appropriately to identify the image and content.
- **Anchor title tag** - where possible, include a title attribute to the link tag to further clarify the destination link. e.g., ``

3.3.3 Meta Tags

- **Description metatag** - Each page should have its own unique Description meta tag that describes the content of the page. The description should be less than 155 characters, or approximately 25 words.
- **Refresh metatag** - DO NOT use the refresh metatag. 301 redirects should be used instead.

3.3.4 Content

- **Content updates** - content should be regularly edited and updated to keep it fresh, and to boost site rankings.
- **Copyrighted Content** - DO NOT use content verbatim from another website. All web content should be unique to the page.

3.3.5 Graphics and Multimedia

- **Javascript** - Javascript can be used for supplemental content and effects. DO NOT display main content with Javascript, as it may prevent search engines from ranking the content.
- **Images** - be sure to include alt text for all images related to the content of a page. e.g., `` for an image of a generic Georgia driver's license.
- **Frames** - DO NOT use frames, as they prevent search engines from indexing the content of your pages.
- **Flash, Video, and Podcasts** - be sure to give it an alternative textual description for multimedia elements that would not otherwise be indexed by search engines. (e.g., via "alt," "longdesc," or in element content).

3.3.6 Domains, URLs, Configurations

- **File names** - Files should have short, descriptive names, with words separated by hyphens. e.g., `license-renewal-form.pdf`
- **Broken Links** - Be sure to regularly check for broken links within the website. Broken links within your site can prevent search engines from appropriately indexing your website. Broken links can also devalue how

search engines rank the quality of your content.

- **Sitemap** - At minimum, the site should link to a complete and up-to-date HTML sitemap. It is also recommended to provide Google with an XML sitemap if possible, [per their requirements](#) [12].
- **Dynamic URLs** - Spiders prefer static URLs, over long, irrelevantly-named dynamic URLs. When using a CMS to manage content, it is best to use a tool that will rewrite dynamic URLs into static, human- and SEO-friendly URLs.

3.3.7 References

- [List of Best and Worst practices for designing a high traffic website](#) [13]

3.3.8 Resources

XML Sitemap Generator

- [XML-Sitemaps](#) [14]

Keyword Analysis

- [Google Keyword Tool](#) [15]
- [Wordstream Keyword Tools](#) [15]

SEO Analyzer

- [Meta Tag Analyzer](#) [16]

Broken Link Checkers

- [Xenu](#) [17](strange site but the free downloadable link checker is very good)
- [Google Webmaster Tools](#) [18](Diagnostics > Crawl Errors lists broken links)

Source URL: <http://portal.georgia.gov/interactive/web-standards/30-content-guidelines>